

**GENERAL KHALID BIN WALEED**  
**Understanding the 7<sup>th</sup> Century Campaign against Sassanid Persian**  
**Empire from the Perspective of Operational Art**

**A Monograph**  
**by**  
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## **Abstract**

Khalid Bin Waleed: Understanding the 7<sup>th</sup> Century Campaign against the Persian Empire from the Perspective of Operational Art. LTC Bilal Sarfraz Khan, 53 pages.

This monograph investigates Khalid Bin Waleed's seventh century (AD 633-634) campaign against the Sassanid Persian Empire in Mesopotamia to trace the evidence that substantiates application of modern characteristics of operational art. The question specifically aims at querying whether, and in what ways General Khalid Bin Waleed applied the contemporaneous concept of operational art in his campaigns. This research relies on the primary and secondary documents pertaining to Persian campaign and the theoretical works on operational art as a basis for discussing and evaluating Khalid's conduct of the campaign.

In order to evaluate and substantiate the thesis, through a synthesis of the theories of James Schneider and Shimon Naveh, the criteria is used to ascertain the presence of critical characteristics of operational art in Khalid Bin Waleed's Persian Campaign. The criteria evaluated several key aspects. First, did Khalid Bin Waleed develop operational objectives through a cognitive tension between the demands of the strategic objectives and those of the tactical actions? Secondly, were his actions oriented towards causing disruption of the enemy system of forces? Thirdly, did he conduct an operational maneuver that aimed to achieve local superiority? Fourth, was his operational approach oriented towards accumulating the effects of tactical actions in pursuit of strategic objective? Lastly, did his actions conform to a broad and universal theory?

This monograph concluded that Khalid Bin Waleed employed characteristics and elements of operational art to defeat the Persian forces in Mesopotamia. He established operational objectives that achieved the strategic aim of seizing the assigned territories in the most efficient manner despite operating under resource-constrained environment. Throughout the Persian Campaign, his use of operational maneuver permitted freedom of action, placed his units at positions of advantage, and achieved operational and tactical surprise with devastating effects. Khalid Bin Waleed's operational approach was based on gaining and maintaining initiative through sequential and simultaneous operations, relied on carefully planned and swift offensive operations, mobile warfare, and securing the allegiance of the local tribes and towns. The superiority of Persian army in quantity and quality forced Khalid Bin Waleed to focus on the disruption of their systems through quick and early decisive actions. Finally, Khalid Bin Waleed's actions were in accordance with the Quranic concept of war that gave his operational actions coherence as well as a broad appeal among the local populace of the conquered cities.

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## Introduction

*The campaigns of Khalid Bin Waleed that ensued in Persia and Iraq are among the most brilliantly executed in the history of warfare and bear favorable comparison to those of Napoleon, Hannibal, and Alexander.*<sup>1</sup>

From the perspective of those who have studied them, the early Arab conquests of the seventh century are astonishing and without precedent – or antecedent. Never before or since in history has such an unlikely people, as the nomadic tribes of Arabia, produced a successful wave of conquests over such a vast territory.<sup>2</sup> Within a few years, the proud Sassanid Persian Empire lay destroyed and the mighty Byzantine Empire reduced to a shadow of its recent glory. By the end of the seventh century, the Muslims ruled a state that stretched from the Atlantic to India, from southern Arabia to Central Asia, covering an area far greater than that of the Roman Empire.<sup>3</sup> The Arab conquests of the Fertile Crescent marked the first phase in a series of military operations conducted by the Muslim Arabs that eventually changed the course of history in the Mediterranean world and in Asia. It was from the western half of the Fertile Crescent, Syria, that dismemberment of the African provinces of Byzantium took place. While, it was from its eastern half, Iraq, that the destruction of Sassanid Persian Empire, conquest of Iran, central Asia, and northwestern India was set into motion.

The man responsible for successfully conducting the early, and the most crucial, military campaigns on these geo-strategic hinges was General Khalid Bin Waleed (AD 592 – 642). Within a span of three years from 633 to 636, he gained an important foothold in Mesopotamia, laid the foundation for subsequent successful operations that led to the complete defeat of the Persians, and delivered the critical blow that crippled Byzantium's control in Syria.

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<sup>1</sup> Phillip K. Hitti, *The Arabs: A Short History* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1968), 42.

<sup>2</sup> George F. Nafziger and Mark W. Walton, *Islam at War: A History* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 255.

<sup>3</sup> David Nicolle, *Armies of the Muslim Conquest* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 1993), 3.

Khalid was one of the most prominent military commanders of the Prophet Muhammad Peace Be Upon Him (PBUH), who conferred upon him the title of Saifullah (the Sword of Allah) for his extraordinary retrograde maneuver against the Byzantine forces in the Battle of Mauta (AD 629). In the reign of the Prophet's (PBUH) immediate successors, Abu Bakr and Umar ibn al-Khattab, General Khalid rose in prominence to become the most dependable military commander of the time. Upon the death of the Prophet (PBUH) in 632, when splintering groups of Arab tribes threatened the control of Muslims over Arabia, General Khalid played a pivotal role in subduing those Arab tribes in the Ridda Wars.<sup>4</sup> He conquered central Arabia and within a year, strengthened the political control of Caliph Abu Bakr. In 633, the Caliph decided to expand the influence of Islam into the neighboring regions of Persian Mesopotamia and Byzantine Syria. Charged with carrying out this onerous task, General Khalid led his small army and by successfully conducting sequential campaigns against vastly superior foes in the most trying circumstances, displayed his true military genius.

The outcome of these campaigns defied conventional logic and baffled generations of historians of Middle Eastern history who offered various explanations to quantify the outcome of these campaigns but almost completely ignored their military aspects. The leading Western explanatory narrative has attributed these defeats to the prevalent socio-political, military, and economic weaknesses of the two empires at the time of Arab intrusion. This theory is given

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<sup>4</sup> The **Ridda Wars** also known as the **Wars of Apostasy** were the first crises that the emerging polity faced immediately after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. Abu Bakr had to assert the authority of the state over a number of Arabian tribes that apparently resisted his authority during AD 632 and 633. The conventional position held by Muslims is that Abu Bakr executed those wars because the tribes had apostatized by following false prophets or by refusing to pay the zakat, and that either type of action warranted suppression by force in the name of Islam. This episode came to be highly revered in Sunni discourse as the great achievement of Abu Bakr that confirmed the validity of his selection as the first Caliph. After all, it was that consolidation of political power throughout the Arabian Peninsula that propelled Muslim expansion into the Byzantine and Sassanian Empires. The Future of Sharia: [http://sharia.law.emory.edu/index.html%3Fq=ar%252Fwars\\_apostasy.html](http://sharia.law.emory.edu/index.html%3Fq=ar%252Fwars_apostasy.html) (accessed on August 12, 2012).

credence by citing the impact of the decades long war between Persia and Byzantium (602-629) and the effects of several natural calamities in the decades preceding these campaigns.<sup>5</sup>

Conversely, Eastern historians have considerably mythologized these campaigns in religious colors by accrediting these fantastic successes to the divine favor or intervention and the unflinching conviction of the followers of the new faith. Although a small group of specialists has made inquiries into the details of Khalid's campaigns from the perspective of their strategic gains as well as the tactical brilliance displayed therein, but these monumental campaigns continue to remain unexplored from the perspective of operational art.<sup>6</sup>

This monograph attempts to fill this critical void by analyzing the Campaign of Khalid Bin Waleed in Persian Mesopotamia (AD 633-634) from this very viewpoint. The question specifically aims at querying whether, and in what ways General Khalid Bin Waleed applied the contemporary concept of operational art in his campaigns. This research relies on a synthesis of primary and secondary documents pertaining to these campaigns and the theoretical works on operational art as a basis for discussing and evaluating Khalid's conduct of his campaigns.

The scribe argues that Khalid Bin Waleed employed and embodied critical aspects of thinking and doing which military theorists and practitioners now consider, or identify, as operational art. Conceptually speaking, operational art is a modern concept that is associated with Western military thinking and practice but it may not necessarily confine itself to this narrow time and space particularly in relation to other cultural milieu. Moreover, existing literature on General Khalid Bin Waleed has looked at him either as an impressive tactical warrior who mastered the art of desert warfare or as a skillful military leader who, as Sir William Muir states, was a daring commander, brave even to the point of rashness, with courage tempered by cool and

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<sup>5</sup> Hugh Kennedy points toward the bubonic plague of AD 541 in Byzantium that recurred in the late sixth and early seventh century as well as the devastating earthquakes in the mid sixth century, which effectively destroyed Beirut. Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of Caliphates*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2004), 2-3.

<sup>6</sup> S.K. Malik, *Khalid Bin Walid: The General of Islam* (Lahore, Pakistan: Ferozesons Limited, 1968), 5.



ready judgment.<sup>7</sup> Asking this question of operational art in a different time and of a different culture can shed more light on both Khalid Bin Waleed and on operational art as it might have existed in a different historical context.

In order to explore these questions that historical literature and current theoretical understanding proposes - this work will present a much needed synthetic historical case study of Khalid Bin Waleed's Persian Campaign from Eastern, Western and religious analytical frameworks. This will balance, or represent an attempt to balance, one-sided parochial analysis by providing a complete picture. The critical theoretical reference for evaluating Khalid Bin Waleed and his putative performance as an operational artist in the Persian Campaign comes from a synthesis of James Schneider and Shimon Naveh's works on operational art, which appreciates the relationship of thinking to doing and learning, and underscores the need to understand operational contexts holistically.

These two eminent theorists articulate certain conceptual characteristics and precise physical manifestations that give form and function to operational art.<sup>8</sup> A set of five criteria have been accrued through a synthesis of these characteristics for evaluating Khalid Bin Waleed's management and conduct of his campaign. To begin with, it is essential that implementation of the concept, plans, or acts should be carried out under a broad and universal theory. Moreover,

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, i.

<sup>8</sup> Shimon Naveh details nine criteria necessary for a concept, plan, or warlike act to be operational: First, it must reflect the cognitive tension between the strategic aim and the tactical mission. Second, it must be based on an industrious maneuver that expresses interaction between the various elements. Third, the planned action must be synergistic throughout its entirety, produce a product significantly greater than the sum of its components. Fourth, the concept should not aim for tactical destruction but disruption of the system. Fifth, it must reflect a contemplative attitude towards randomness and interrelation between contentious systems. Sixth, the plan should be non-linear in nature, and should be hierarchically structured and express depth. Seventh, it must reflect the deliberate interaction between maneuver and attrition. Eighth, the concept must consider ends, ways, and means, and must stand alone within the scope of its mission. Finally, the concept should relate to a broad and universal theory. Ibid, 13-14. Schneider states that the fullest expression of operational art is manifested through several key attributes: distributed operations, distributed campaigns, continuous logistics, instantaneous command and control, operationally durable formations, operational vision, a distributed enemy, and distributed deployment. James J. Schneider, *The Structure of Strategic Revolution: Total War and the Roots of the Soviet Warfare State* (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1994), 35-53.

since operational art thrives on the cognitive tension between the strategic and tactical levels therefore, its prime task is to translate the strategic aims into effective military operations and campaigns. An operational manoeuvre is the next criterion that aims to vary the density of forces for gaining a local advantage at specific times and geographically critical points during the campaign.<sup>9</sup> What is also of equal importance is the orientation of operations in a manner that aims to cause disruption of opponent's system by creating an operational shock.<sup>10</sup> Lastly, the operational approach taken by an operational artist to conduct his campaign should exploit the tension between various forms of operations to create a synergistic effect. This paper argues that Khalid Bin Waleed was an operational artist because his actions and thought reflected and demonstrated this theoretical construct.

The first section of this paper will provide a review of vast and varied literature pertinent to this research. It summarizes the leading theoretical and conceptual parameters of operational art, and highlights existing gaps in historical and theoretical literature on Khalid Bin Waleed's campaigns by identifying primary themes fostered by the most defining authors in the field. Several important perspectives emerge in this consideration. Next, the readers will explore the theoretical underpinnings for the analysis of Khalid Bin Waleed and his campaigns. Within this contextual backdrop, the subsequent section will delve into details of the Persian Campaign wherein the reader will be able to identify the conceptual components of operational art, as developed by Shimon Naveh and James Schneider, which will begin to show themselves in relation to Khalid Bin Waleed.

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<sup>9</sup> Major Kenneth P. Adgie, *Askaris, Asymmetry, and Small Wars: Operational Art and the German East African Campaign, 1914-1918* (School of Advanced Military Studies: Fort Leavenworth, 2001), 6.

<sup>10</sup> The notion of operational shock delineates in practical terms a consequential state of a fighting system that can no longer accomplish its aims. The concept evolved with the realization after World War I that the military system cannot be physically destroyed. It led to a thorough analysis of the military system's characteristics and its inherent weaknesses. Naveh posits that in order to create operational shock, it is necessary to target the military system's potential weaknesses namely: dominance of the aim, deep structure, simultaneity, depth, and Centre of Gravity. Shimon Naveh, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence: The Evolution of Operational Theory* (Portland, Oregon: Frank Cass Publishing, 1997), 16-19.

## Literature Review

This section traces the origins and evolution of operational art with a view to highlight its theoretical aspects as well as the latest views of the Western theorists and practitioners. It then sets out to highlight various themes and perspectives fostered in various primary and secondary sources on the subject of early Arab conquests and Khalid Bin Waleed. It establishes the context in which Khalid Bin Waleed's Persian Campaign will be unfolded.

### On Operational Art

The term operational art, as many military practitioners may know and understand it, is widely believed to have emerged as a new and distinct component of warfare in the early nineteenth century. Seen as the gray area linking strategy and tactics, it spans the theory and practice of planning and conducting campaigns and major operations aimed at accomplishing strategic and operational objectives in a given theatre of operations.<sup>11</sup>

This Eurocentric conception primarily gained traction after the United States Army's doctrinal embrace of operational art in the early 1980s and its purported successful application in Gulf War I.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, several definitions and explanations of the concept have emerged. Fundamentally, theorists disagree whether the shift from classical strategy to modern war and operational art occurred with Napoleon, Hooker's army at Chancellorsville, or through Svechin and Tuchachevsky's theory of Soviet Deep Operations.<sup>13</sup> What is constant is the explicit or

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<sup>11</sup> John Aderson Olsen and Martin Van Creveld, *The Evolution of Operational Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1.

<sup>12</sup> The introduction of the term operational art in the 1986 field manual marked the definite recognition of 'creativity' as the basic quality required from operational commanders. W. P. Franz, "Maneuver: The Dynamic Element of Combat," *Military Review* LXIII, 5 (1983), 4.

<sup>13</sup> Epstein defines modern war on the characteristics which include: strategic war plans integrating various theaters of operations; fullest mobilization of state resources, including the raising of conscript armies; and the use of operational campaigns by opposing sides to achieve a strategic objective in various theaters of operation. Robert M. Epstein, *Napoleon's Last Victory* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1994), p 7. Schneider strongly links technological changes to the birth of operational art. James J. Schneider, *The Structure of Strategic Revolution: Total War and the Roots of the Soviet Warfare State*

implied notion that operational art relates with industrial age weapons, massed armies, and battlefields where terms such as front, rear, and depth have a measurable value.<sup>14</sup> It is pertinent to note that by continuously framing operational art in such a context, we restrict our overall education process by overshadowing its creative dimension.<sup>15</sup>

The very recent United States Army Doctrinal Publication defines operational art as “the pursuit of strategic objectives, in whole or in part, through the arrangement of tactical actions in time, space, and purpose.”<sup>16</sup> It encapsulates two key components - the physical action and the intellectual direction. Professor Thomas Bruscino’s illuminating explanation of the historical and evolutionary underpinnings of this concept highlight the significance of this study:

The origin of operational art is very simple: the first time a commander faced a type of problem that created the need to disperse his force’s tactical actions, and he responded by purposefully arranging those tactical actions in time, space, and purpose to pursue a strategic objective, he was practicing operational art. When that might have been specifically is best left to ‘historians of antiquity’, but certainly, Alexander the Great acted in these terms during his wars across Asia, as did Julius Caesar in his pacification of Gaul. The point is that the need for operational art does not depend on the presence of any specific type of unit or echelon, such as corps or joint task forces.<sup>17</sup>

Shimon Naveh’s definition of operational art provides a more holistic and timeless appeal. He opines that, “the Campaigns where a systemic approach was applied, in both planning and management of armed forces, and the nature of warfare was marked by a sound operational

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(Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1994), p 31-53. However, in a footnote in his article about art, Schneider concedes that the thirteenth century Mongols may have actually practiced operational art. Schneider, *The Loose Marble --- and the Origins of Operational Art*, 98. Naveh believes that Soviet operational theory played a key role in the development of U.S. Army doctrine and operational theory. Shimon Naveh, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence: The Evolution of Operational Theory* (Portland, Oregon: Frank Cass Publishing, 1997), 165.

<sup>14</sup> Major Kenneth P. Adgie, *Askaris, Asymmetry, and Small Wars: Operational Art and the German East African Campaign, 1914-1918* (School of Advanced Military Studies: Fort Leavenworth, 2001), 5.

<sup>15</sup> In order to maintain relevance of this concept in a counterinsurgency environment, theorists have already made their case by proposing the second grammar of operational art. Antulio J. Echevarria II, “Reconsidering Wars Logic and Grammar,” *Infinity Journal*, Issue 2, Spring 2011.

<sup>16</sup> Department of the Army, *Army Doctrinal Publication 3-0: Unified Land Operations* (Fort Leavenworth: Kansas, 2012), 9.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Bruscino, *The Theory of Operational Art and Unified Land Operations* (U.S. Army Command and General Staff College: Fort Leavenworth, 2011), 14.

logic, can be defined as operational art.”<sup>18</sup> Naveh’s theory benefits from Bertalanffy’s concept of ‘systems’, which proposes the existence of a complex set of interacting elements and looks at problems based on an understanding of the totality of the interrelation between a vast numbers of variables.<sup>19</sup> The military, being and operating in and in relation to an open system, thrives on its interaction with other systems and amplifies the non-linear dynamics of this interaction. Naveh examines the dichotomous relationship between the system and its components within the context of strategic aim that results in a cognitive tension that demands translation of strategic aim into concrete objectives and missions for the system’s individual components.<sup>20</sup> The military commander is thus required to possess intellectual creativity to exploit the potential of the abstract/ strategic and mechanical/ tactical extremes into a functional explanatory formula. The nature of the relationship between the two provides the synergetic coherence of the operational action, and its continuity. This conceptual construct provides the requisite theoretical basis for evaluating the campaigns of Khalid Bin Waleed from the perspective of operational art.

## **On Khalid Bin Waleed’s Persian Campaign**

A review of available literature on the history of warfare in general and the early Arab conquests in particular highlights the pervasive contemporary tendency to study a short period of Roman history ending with Augustus, ignoring history of the ‘Middle Ages’, and then leaping forward to England in 1066.<sup>21</sup> The Arab Conquests during this important epoch of history receive

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<sup>18</sup> Shimon Naveh, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence: The Evolution of Operational Theory* (Portland, Oregon: Frank Cass Publishing, 1997), xiii.

<sup>19</sup> Ludwig Van Bertalanffy, *General System Theory* (New York: George Braziller Inc, 1969), 3.

<sup>20</sup> Shimon Naveh, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence: The Evolution of Operational Theory* (Portland, Oregon: Frank Cass Publishing, 1997), 7.

<sup>21</sup> Middle or Dark Ages referred to as a historical period lasting roughly from AD 500 to 1500. It begins with fall of the Roman Empire in the late antiquity of fifth and sixth Centuries and lasts until the advent of the so-called Italian and English renaissances, or rebirths of classical learning, in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Britannica Encyclopedia: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/491710/Rashidun> (accessed August 3, 2012).

only a brief mention even in the most popular contemporary works on the evolution of military thought or the history of warfare.<sup>22</sup> Sir John Bagot Glubb, an eminent British historian and military practitioner, provides the following explanation for this tendency:

The Muslim conquests were for many centuries regarded in Europe as terrible disasters, of which no Christian wished to be reminded. While many thousands of books have been written since the Renaissance on the subject of the Roman Empire, yet the number of standard works in English on the Arab conquests can perhaps be counted on the fingers of one hand.<sup>23</sup>

However, it is pertinent to note that, since the middle of twentieth century, this dearth of literature on the early Arab conquests has been partially compensated by a small group of specialists who have extensively researched the primary sources and offered fresh interpretations and analyses. Therefore, in order to obtain historical evidence to ascertain application of operational art by General Khalid Bin Waleed in the Persian campaign, the research for this work has identified two large bodies of knowledge. These include the predominantly twentieth century secondary sources and the primary sources; largely compiled and prepared between the eighth and tenth centuries.

## **Secondary Sources – Themes and Narratives**

Fred McGraw Donner, a specialist on Arab-Persian relations, is one of the leading U.S. historians of the early Islamic period in the English-speaking world. In his definitive work, *Early Islamic Conquests*, he minutely analyzes the first phase of Arab Conquests in which he has expertly negotiated the issues of chronology contained in most primary sources.<sup>24</sup> His

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<sup>22</sup> *Cambridge Illustrated History of Warfare* edited by Geoffrey Parker, encompassing historical inquiries from 600 BC up till 2007 devotes only one paragraph to the interaction of Byzantium and the Arabs. Geoffrey Parker, *Cambridge Illustrated History of Warfare* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995). This pervasive tendency is also noted in Martin Van Creveld's work designed to trace the evolution of military thought since antiquity that only makes a brief reference of the early Arab conquests while highlighting the Byzantium military treatise, *Strategikon*. Martin Van Creveld, *The Art of War: War and Military Thought* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2005), 57.

<sup>23</sup> John B. Glubb, *The Great Arab Conquests* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1967), 9.

<sup>24</sup> Fred McGraw Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

examination of the strategic context and the tactical actions conducted therein, provide significant evidence by which it is possible to assess Khalid Bin Waleed's adaptive and holistic approach for conducting the both Syrian and Persian campaigns. He instructively suggests that, "the Islamic conquests must be seen as more than a mere accident of history; they stand, rather, as a remarkable testament to the power of human action mobilized by ideological commitment as a force in human affairs."<sup>25</sup>

Among other secondary sources used to obtain the Persian perspective, the work of Dr. Kaveh Farrokh greatly informs this monograph.<sup>26</sup> Although he does not analyze the military aspects of the early Arab conquests in detail - a ubiquitous tendency among most Persian authors - but his strategic overview of the Persian landscape before and during the Arab Conquests is particularly useful. He largely attributes the reasons of Persian defeat to the ensuing turmoil of royal succession and poor state control in the immediate aftermath of the Persian – Byzantine War (602-629) that led to a widespread social and religious disaffection in the Persian population. Moreover, he argues that the protracted conflict with Byzantium depleted state resources to such an extent that Persia was militarily handicapped to mount a credible response to the Arab invasion.<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, he credits the Arabs for their ability to acquire intelligence, conduct operations with speed, and for gaining support of the local populace through the message of egalitarianism and social justice.

Lieutenant General Sir John Bagot Glubb was the first, and perhaps so far the only, Western military practitioner and historian who made use of his rich military experience to provide an exclusive interpretation of the early Arab conquests.<sup>28</sup> He was also uniquely equipped

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>26</sup> Kaveh Farrokh, *Shadows in the Desert: Ancient Persia at War* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2007).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 265-266.

<sup>28</sup> John B. Glubb, *The Great Arab Conquests* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1967) and *The Empire of the Arabs* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1965).

with the experience of commanding local formations in Jordan and Saudi Arabia in early and mid twentieth century. An experience of over thirty years enabled him to learn the Arabic language, understand the local culture, and to visit each site of the battles of Khalid Bin Waleed. His analyses of the age of early religious enthusiasm and military campaigns are both sound and useful. He dedicates five chapters of his book that are particularly useful in understanding Khalid's thought process behind selecting his objectives and formulating his operational approach.

The highly venerated soldier scholars of Pakistan Army, Lieutenant General A.I. Akram and Brigadier General S.K. Malik provide the most useful sources for carrying out advanced research into the campaigns of General Khalid Bin Waleed.<sup>29</sup> Akram's account of Khalid Bin Waleed also benefits from similar advantages of Glubb wherein he learned the Arabic language with the specific aim of gaining a first hand understanding of primary sources of the early Arab conquests. More importantly, after extensively travelling and visiting all battle locations he was able to leverage his professional expertise, accrued over years of distinguished military service, to draw pertinent conclusions and direct inferences. Both biographies of Khalid Bin Waleed by A.I. Akram and S.K. Malik are unique; the former exclusively used Arab primary sources and the later synthesized the works of leading twentieth century secondary sources. Together, these books contain the most exhaustive repository of an authentically constructed life sketch of Khalid Bin Waleed and his military experiences. The only limitations of these works reside in the fact that they do not analyze his campaigns from the perspective of operational art because this concept had yet not entered the military lexicon in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the years of publication of these books.

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<sup>29</sup> Lieutenant General A.I. Akram, *The Sword of Allah, Khalid bin Al-Waleed: His Life and Campaigns* (Rawalpindi, Pakistan: Ferozsons Limited/ Army Education Press, 1970) and S.K. Malik, *Khalid Bin Walid: The General of Islam* (Lahore, Pakistan: Ferozsons Limited, 1968).



Collectively, the works of eminent Western scholars like Hugh Kennedy, David Nicolle, John Haldon, George Nafziger, Mark Walton, and Mathew S. Gordon provide a corpus of the latest interpretations of the primary and other secondary sources.<sup>30</sup> They represent the results of modern research into the historical sources of the early Arab conquests and act as the litmus test for judging the authenticity of the earlier secondary sources of twentieth century. The historical narrative now exists in an even more coherent and cohesive manner for conducting the intended explorations for this monograph.

In addition to references made to the Holy Quran and Hadith, the works of Brigadier General S.K. Malik and Shaybani's *Siyar* provide explanations of various aspects and dimensions of the Quranic concept of war in a most comprehensive manner.<sup>31</sup> The utility of S.K. Malik's work is evident by the fact that he relates the interpretations of the Quranic concept of war with historical examples from the era of the Prophet (PBUH) and the subsequent Arab conquests. These are critical in evaluating Khalid Bin Waleed's campaigns from the required criteria of operational actions conforming to a broad and universal concept.

## Primary Sources

The extant primary sources from Arab and Persian historians are criticized for various anomalies and biases however, the primary critique is directed towards the fact that they were documented two centuries after the Arab conquests took place. Although the Persian primary sources are scant but the Arab sources provide the largest documentary evidence of this period.

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<sup>30</sup> Hugh Kennedy, *The Great Arab Conquests: How the Spread of Islam Changed the World We Live In* (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2007) and *The Prophet and the Age of Caliphates*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2004), David Nicolle, *Armies of the Muslim Conquest* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 1993) and, *Yarmuk AD 636: The Muslim Conquest of Syria* (Northants: Osprey Publishing Ltd, 1994), John Haldon, *Byzantium at War: AD 600-1453* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2003), George F. Nafziger and Mark W. Walton, *Islam at War: A History* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2003), Mathew S. Gordon, *The Rise of Islam* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2005).

<sup>31</sup> Shaybani's *Siyar*, *The Islamic Law of Nations* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1966), Brigadier S.K. Malik, *The Quranic Concept of War* (Delhi, India: Adam Publishers, 1992) and *Quranic Concept of Power* (Lahore, Pakistan: Progressive Publishers, 1991).

This paper benefits from the primary sources through the detailed references made in secondary source works however, the English translations of the two most voluminous accounts of the Arab primary source authors namely al-Baladhuri and al-Tabari have been used directly.<sup>32</sup>

The handful accounts of Persian primary sources glean from and conform to the versions provided by the leading Muslim authors; all accounts of the conquests virtually repeat the version of al-Baladhuri.<sup>33</sup> However, in doing so, their strong bias degrades the achievements of Arab military commanders and their forces by pointing toward the impact of protracted conflict with Byzantium that left Persian Empire politically and militarily weak. Most historians consider these works incapable of providing an objective standard to confidently check the Muslim accounts.

The review of existing literature reveals a fundamental gap in the body of knowledge - a lack of analysis from the perspective of operational art. Given the rise of interest in the early Arab conquests in the last five decades, the sifting of primary sources according to the canons of criticism of our times have considerably removed the barriers of authenticity, chronology, and coherence. Therefore, now more than ever, a detailed inquiry can take place to ascertain whether the thinking and actions of Khalid Bin Waleed in his Persian campaign demonstrates presence of operational art.

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<sup>32</sup> *The Origins of the Islamic State* by Philip Khuri Hitti which is a translation of *Kitab Futuh Al-Buldan (Book of the Conquests of the Land)* by al-Baladhuri has been extensively used by the author. The History of al-Tabari is a translation of the voluminous works of al-Tabari's *Ta'rikh al Rusul wa'l Muluk (The History of the Prophets and Kings)* wherein volume XII and XIII that are completely dedicated to the conquest of the two regions under scrutiny have been used.

<sup>33</sup> Donald Routledge Hill, *The Termination of Hostilities in the Early Arab Conquests AD 636-656* (London, Luzac & Company, 1971), 30.

## Approach for the Theoretical Construct

*“War is an art and as such is not susceptible to explanation by fixed formula”<sup>34</sup>*

In order to elucidate the metrics employed in this monograph to gauge the campaigns of Khalid Bin Waleed, a detailed description of the characteristics of operational art, gleaned through a synthesis of the theories of Shimon Naveh and James Schneider, is the specific preserve of this section. It attempts to underscore the conceptual and practical aspects of operational art and making linkages with the intellectual tools that collectively form the elements of operational art.<sup>35</sup>

The intellectual direction of operational art begins with determining and understanding the political and strategic aims.<sup>36</sup> It provides the context in which the commander defines the needed time, space, and resources to accomplish the aim with military force.<sup>37</sup> The first critical characteristic of operational art is thus the understanding of cognitive tension between strategy and tactics that leads to development of operational objectives. According to Naveh, “the substance of operational plan consists of the strategic aim which indicates a predetermined definition of the entire operational accomplishment. The division of this aim into operational objectives and tactical missions creates the cognitive tension that moves the system towards its final objective.”<sup>38</sup> These objectives do not aim at winning a single battle but provide the tactical units with their purpose and definition of success. It sequences these tactical actions in a logically

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<sup>34</sup> General George S. Patton, Jr., “Success in War”, *The Infantry Journal Reader*, 1931.

<sup>35</sup> The latest U.S. Army Doctrine defines operational art as the cognitive approach by commanders and staffs—supported by their skill, knowledge, experience, creativity, and judgment—to develop strategies, campaigns, and operations to organize and employ military forces by integrating ends, ways, and means. The elements of operational art are enumerated as: End State and Conditions, Center of Gravity, Decisive Points, Lines of Operations and Lines of Effort, Operational Reach, Basing, Tempo, Phasing and Transitions, Culmination, and Risk. U.S Army Doctrinal Publication 5-0: *Operations Process* (2012), 6-7.

<sup>36</sup> Major Kenneth P. Adgie, *Askaris, Asymmetry, and Small Wars: Operational Art and the German East African Campaign, 1914-1918* (School of Advanced Military Studies: Fort Leavenworth, 2001), 5.

<sup>37</sup> Shimon Naveh, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence: The Evolution of Operational Theory* (Portland, Oregon: Frank Cass Publishing, 2000), 126.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

linked program that arrays friendly strength against enemy weakness. Operational objectives guide each engagement in a systemic fashion allowing the synergistic effect to be greater than merely the sum of its parts.

In exercising operational art, instead of conducting operations with an aim to cause destruction of the enemy forces, the military commander aims to cause disruption of the entire enemy system. History is replete with numerous tactical victories achieved through destruction of enemy's force that ultimately resulted in an overall operational or strategic defeat. The Soviet's abysmal performance against the Germans in World War I, and the lessons of the Warsaw campaign encouraged military leaders to reevaluate the paradigms of warfare based on destruction of enemy force. The theory of disruption thus evolved to degrade the entire enemy system, allowing tactical successes to accumulate and achieve operational objectives.

Disruption deprives the enemy the ability to react to a dynamic situation and allows tactical units to face a degraded enemy.<sup>39</sup> This operational effect accumulates through a combination of distributed operations, attacking enemy's cybernetic function, and gaining and maintaining initiative through deception. The distributed operations exploit deep and inter-battle maneuver to maintain freedom of action by retaining the ability to choose the time and place of battle.<sup>40</sup> Concurrently, disruption of the enemy's cybernetic function prevents the enemy from creating the synergy between its components wherein isolated and unsupported units are defeated piecemeal.<sup>41</sup> The use of deception to conceal friendly aims and intentions causes further dislocation of his mental faculties. It bears a mention that disruption is an immensely useful tool

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<sup>39</sup> John English, *The Operational Art: Developments in the Theories of War*, ed. B.J.C. McKercher and Michael Hennessy (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 1996), 14.

<sup>40</sup> Major Kenneth P. Adgie, *Askaris, Asymmetry, and Small Wars: Operational Art and the German East African Campaign, 1914-1918* (School of Advanced Military Studies: Fort Leavenworth, 2001), 5.

<sup>41</sup> James J. Schneider, *The Structure of Strategic Revolution: Total War and the Roots of the Soviet Warfare State* (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1994), 30-32.

for an inferior force that strives to maintain the initiative while conducting high tempo operations.<sup>42</sup>

One of the primary physical components of operational art is the operational maneuver, which Schneider defines as “the relational movement in depth that maximizes freedom of action for the destruction of enemy’s capacity to wage war.”<sup>43</sup> The concept of freedom of action detaches the tactical units from purely seeking a decisive battle, and provides the cognitive linkage between strategy and tactical action. Mao viewed freedom of action as a critical precondition to retain initiative in a campaign, and used this concept as a guide to effectively manipulate the density of forces to gain and maintain relative superiority.<sup>44</sup> Operational maneuver advocates creation of local superiority at specific points throughout the depth of the battlefield.

Operational maneuver flourishes when combined with the concepts of fragmentation, simultaneity, and tempo.<sup>45</sup> Fragmentation is the opposite of synergy and it seeks to deprive the enemy its intellectual and physical cohesion by limiting his ability to understand dynamic situations and preventing the necessary synergy between his subordinate formations.<sup>46</sup> The ability to break the time and space bondage of the enemy forces by proactively occupying the battle spaces profoundly impacts on the enemy scheme of maneuver denying it the ability to respond to dynamic situations effectively. Since the enemy loses its ability to synchronize actions effectively, it is forced to react with its forces in a fragmented piece-meal fashion.

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<sup>42</sup> Major Kenneth P. Adgie, *Askaris, Asymmetry, and Small Wars: Operational Art and the German East African Campaign, 1914-1918* (School of Advanced Military Studies: Fort Leavenworth, 2001), 5.

<sup>43</sup> James J. Schneider, *The Structure of Strategic Revolution: Total War and the Roots of the Soviet Warfare State* (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1994), 32.

<sup>44</sup> Mao Tse Tung, *Selected Military Writings* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Combat Studies Institute, 1991), 235.

<sup>45</sup> Naveh’s elements of operational maneuver are fragmentation, simultaneity, and momentum. Shimon Naveh, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence: The Evolution of Operational Theory* (Portland, Oregon: Frank Cass Publishing, 2000), 215-221.

<sup>46</sup> Major Kenneth P. Adgie, *Askaris, Asymmetry, and Small Wars: Operational Art and the German East African Campaign, 1914-1918* (School of Advanced Military Studies: Fort Leavenworth, 2001), 5.

Simpkin credits Tukhachevskii for exploring the concept of simultaneity, defining it as “bringing the largest number of troops into contact at the same time” within the context of operations over a broad or deep front, and the interaction of the turning and holding force.<sup>47</sup> Simultaneity assists the commander in coordinating the actions of dispersed and diverse units by bringing to bear multiple functions and capabilities of the entire force on the enemy. This concept synchronizes friendly force’s actions in a manner that they overwhelm the enemy’s decision making cycle. While tactical actions seek concurrent activity to heighten the effects, simultaneity seeks to shape the enemy across its battle space and cause disruption before it can react.<sup>48</sup>

U.S. Army FM 3-0 defines tempo as the “relative speed and rhythm of military operations over time with respect to the enemy.”<sup>49</sup> Its purpose is to overwhelm the enemy’s ability to understand and react to the friendly actions, through simultaneous operations, avoiding unnecessary battles, and enabling the subordinates to exercise initiative to act independently within the scope of the overall directives.<sup>50</sup> “Controlling tempo requires both audacity and patience: audacity that initiates the actions needed to develop a situation; patience allows a situation to develop until the force can strike at the decisive time and place.”<sup>51</sup> Ultimately, the aim of any commander is to maintain an appropriate tempo required to retain initiative in order to achieve the end state. Making quantitatively better decisions faster than the enemy, designing and executing an operation in which each component’s speed is linked to the entire system, and exploiting the cumulative effects achieves the “ruthless reinforcement of success.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Richard Simpkin, *Deep Battle: The Brainchild of Marshall Tukhachevski* (New York, New York: Brassey Defense Publishing 1987), 32.

<sup>48</sup> Richard E. Simpkin, *Race to the Swift: Thoughts on Twenty-First Century Warfare*. 2nd ed. (London, England: Brassey Defense Publishing, 1986), 148.

<sup>49</sup> Department of the Army, *Field Manual 3-0: Operations* (Washington DC, Feb 2011), 7-13.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 7-13.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 7-13.

<sup>52</sup> Richard Simpkin, *Deep Battle: The Brainchild of Marshall Tukhachevski*, 260.

Operational approach is the next evaluation criteria for analyzing a campaign for application of operational art. It is “a broad conceptualization of the general actions that will produce the conditions that define the end state.”<sup>53</sup> By drawing on his experience, knowledge, education, intellect, intuition, and creativity, the operational commander determines which conditions satisfy the orders, guidance, and directives which when taken together become the end state.<sup>54</sup> The operational approach thus formed, aims to create an asymmetric advantage over the enemy by posturing friendly force’s unique capabilities and advantages against the enemy’s weaknesses. The formulation of operational approach falls within the intellectual dimension of operational art and acts as the ‘creative force’ in any campaign design. By assigning components a purpose, allocating areas of operations, and blending different capabilities, the commander orients the tactical actions of his forces towards achievement of operational and strategic objectives.<sup>55</sup> As it were, the ultimate goal of operational art is to destroy the enemy’s capacity to wage war through an operational approach that simultaneously attacks his will and his means.<sup>56</sup>

Lastly, the characterization of a concept, plan, or an act as operational, requires that it should relate to a broad and universal theory. Theory generally refers to varying types of formulations that are usually abstract and include vague conceptualizations or descriptions of events or things, prescriptions about what are desirable behaviors and arrangement, or any untested hypothesis or idea.<sup>57</sup> In describing the scientific connotation of the term, Reynolds opines that it refers to abstract statements that are part of scientific knowledge through either the

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<sup>53</sup> Department of the Army, *Field Manual 3: Operations* (Washington DC, Feb 2011), 7-1.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 7-1.

<sup>55</sup> Major Kenneth P. Adgie, *Askaris, Asymmetry, and Small Wars: Operational Art and the German East African Campaign, 1914-1918* (School of Advanced Military Studies: Fort Leavenworth, 2001), 5.

<sup>56</sup> James J. Schneider and Lawrence L. Izzo, Clausewitz’s Elusive Center of Gravity, *Parameters*, (September 1987), 57.

<sup>57</sup> Paul D. Reynolds, *A Primer in Theory Construction* (Massachusetts, Allyn and Bacon, 1971), 10-11.

set of laws, the axiomatic, or the causal process form.<sup>58</sup> However, Clausewitz in his book *On War* has incisively explored and critically described the theory of war in book two. According to him, “theory is an analytical investigation leading to a close acquaintance with the subject, the purpose of which is to clarify concepts and ideas that have become confused and entangled.”<sup>59</sup> The theory of war that equates to the two related categories: preparations for war and the war proper, is concerned with the use of the means, once they have been developed, for the purposes of the war.<sup>60</sup> The theory or concepts inform military doctrine and provides commanders, planners, and staff the framework within which military activities take place in an efficient manner.

These five evaluation criteria balance the intellectual and physical domains of operational art that simultaneously place demands on the operational artist to think creatively and to act in a holistic manner. This theoretical framework effectively liberates this important operational concept from the trappings of its perceived origin and evolution within a restricted time and space and mechanical considerations.

The popular perception suggests that, the early Arab conquests were a result of some deterministic or accidental historic process that occurred through unplanned and mindless battles by fanatic Muslims; blinded by religious zeal.<sup>61</sup> The scribe contends that by employing the evaluation criteria of the modern concept of operational art, as elaborated in this section, a very different picture emerges that transcends biases and illuminates important military aspects of General Khalid and his historical campaign in Persia. The next section scrutinizes the Persian campaign with a view to finding credible evidence that can cogently ascertain if Khalid Bin Waleed applied a systemic approach and a sound operational logic to conduct his campaign.

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 10-11.

<sup>59</sup> Michael Howard and Peter Paret, *Carl Von Clausewitz: On War* (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1976), 360.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 131,132, and 141.

<sup>61</sup> Fred McGraw Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 7-8.



## The Persian Campaign

*Generalized accounts of the past are useless; it is far better to study one campaign in minute detail than to acquire vague knowledge of a dozen wars.*<sup>62</sup>

In the geo-strategic setting of the early seventh century, Arabia was located south east of the Byzantine Empire and southwest of the Persian Empire. The territories of semi-autonomous Ghassanid and Lakhmid tribes of Christian Arabs acted as the buffer between the two empires and Arabia. These were essentially client states wherein the former tribe had its allegiance to the Byzantine and the later had its loyalty towards the Persian Empire.<sup>63</sup>

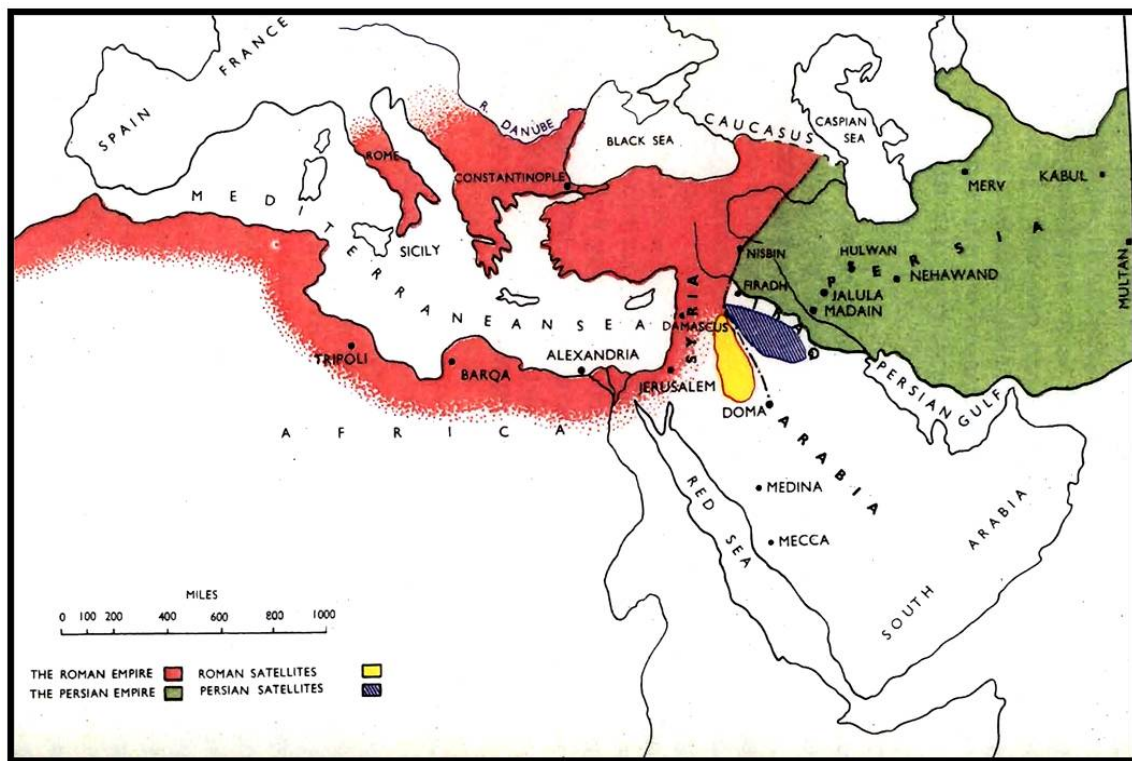


Figure 1: Geo-Strategic Environment - AD 633. Taken from S.K. Malik, *Khalid Bin Walid: The General of Islam* (Lahore, Pakistan: Ferozesons Limited, 1968), 4-A.

<sup>62</sup> Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, Edited by Michael Howard, Peter Paret (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1976), 24.

<sup>63</sup> Mathew S. Gordon, *The Rise of Islam* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2005), 3.

Mesopotamia was the prized possession of the Persian Empire due to its cultural heritage, wealth, and abundance. Ctesiphon was its capital – a mighty metropolis and the seat of glory of the Persian Empire and Hira was the capital of the Arab Lakhmid Dynasty in the western and southern parts of Mesopotamia. Situated on the west bank of the Euphrates, Hira was a major communication center with many citadels to improve its defensibility. The other important town of Mesopotamia was Uballa, situated on the estuary of the combined Tigris and Euphrates. It was the main port of the Persian Empire and was the emporium of the sea-borne trade with India, China, and other maritime countries of the East.<sup>64</sup>

The capital towns of Ctesiphon (Madain) and Hira were located on the fringes of the mighty Tigris and Euphrates respectively. These famous rivers have changed their course more than once since the time of Babylon. The map used in this paper indicates the course that these rivers followed in the early days of Islam. The Persian Empire had begun to decline politically, but it would be wrong to imagine that it had declined militarily. The Persian soldier was still the best-equipped warrior of the day and the Persian army comprised seasoned veterans from the wars of antiquity with the Byzantine Empire. However, the Achilles heel of the Persian army was its lack of mobility, a problem further magnified by its heavy equipment. This was how Mesopotamia stood politically, geographically, and militarily when the Caliph launched Khalid on the Persian Empire.

After successfully subjugating the Apostasy through the year long Ridda Wars, Caliph Abu Bakr consolidated his political control over the entire Arabian Peninsula by February 633. It was this firm subjugation of Arabia that provided him necessary wherewithal to undertake an expansionist movement of unparalleled proportions.<sup>65</sup> Almost immediately afterwards, the Caliph began two consecutive campaigns against the two mighty empires of the time. There has been a

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<sup>64</sup> John B. Glubb, *Great Arab Conquests* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1967), 126.

<sup>65</sup> Fred McGraw Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 89-90.

considerable debate among most Middle Eastern historians about the actual reasons for Abu Bakr's initiation of military campaigns. Since Byzantium was an enemy of the new Islamic state since the times of the Prophet (PBUH), it was only natural for the Caliph to follow the policies of the Prophet (PBUH).<sup>66</sup> However, it is pertinent to note that the reasons for initiating the Persian Campaign offer a straightforward explanation as well.

Musanna bin Harisa, a notable chief of the tribe of Bani Bakr that inhabited the northeastern part of Arabian Peninsula, had participated alongside the Muslim Arabs in the Ridda Wars. Soon after the successful conclusion of the last battle of Apostasy at Yamama, he began to launch raids along the Mesopotamian periphery of the Persian Empire. Encouraged by his successes, Musanna approached Caliph Abu Bakr in February 633 and described the political crisis that bedeviled the Persian court and the inability of the Persian garrisons to fight mobile, fast-moving engagements.<sup>67</sup> He requested for permission of the Caliph to conduct raids deeper into Persia to not only exploit its riches but also as a measure to deter any Persian designs of aggression towards the Arabian Peninsula in the future.<sup>68</sup>

While exercising due prudence, the Caliph gave Musanna permission to conduct limited raids against the Persians however, soon afterwards the Caliph began to seriously consider exploiting the situation in Persia through a military campaign. Since the Caliph's focus was aimed at initiating a military campaign against Byzantine Syria therefore, he was skeptical about selecting such a large strategic objective within the given resource constraints.<sup>69</sup> Eventually, the idea of enlarging the boundaries of Islam, spreading the new faith, and improving the economic condition of Arabia convinced the Caliph to launch his forces against the Persian Empire.

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<sup>66</sup> Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of Caliphates*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2004), 58.

<sup>67</sup> Lieutenant General A.I. Akram, *Sword of Allah, Khalid bin Al-Waleed: His Life and Campaigns* (Rawalpindi, Pakistan: Ferozesons Limited/ Army Education Press, 1970), 222.

<sup>68</sup> Tabari, Vol. 2, 552.

<sup>69</sup> John B. Glubb, *The Great Arab Conquests* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1967), 131.

However, at the same time Abu Bakr was cognizant of the deep, unreasoning fear of the Persian Empire that traditionally ran in the Arabs. It was also important not to suffer a defeat as it could deliver a crucial set back to his political control over Arabia and the confidence achieved through the recent military successes of the Ridda Wars. To this end, Abu Bakr made three important decisions: he would restrict the objective to the Mesopotamian region primarily inhabited by the Christian Arab tribes of Lakhmid Dynasty, Khalid Bin Waleed would be the commander of the Army, and the Army would comprise only volunteers.<sup>70</sup> In order to adequately resource General Khalid to plan and conduct his campaign, Abu Bakr commandeered the warriors of the two other tribes in the northeastern Arabia including the tribe of Musanna. The orders given to Khalid Bin Waleed read “proceed to Iraq - start operations in the region of Uballa - fight the Persians and the people who inhabit their land. Your objective is Hira.”<sup>71</sup>

Khalid Bin Waleed was still at Yamama, the site of his last opposition in the Ridda Wars, when he received these orders. Being a military commander who had an impetuous yearning for combat, he immediately sprang at the given opportunity and feverishly set about making detailed preparations for the impending campaign. In keeping with the Caliph’s instructions, he called for volunteers from his Army of 13,000 soldiers who had fought the Ridda Wars with him. To his surprise, only 2,000 men volunteered. However, their conviction in the new faith and devotion to the cause of spreading Islam proved of high value to Khalid during the campaign.<sup>72</sup> Khalid had also dispatched riders with a call for volunteers to the tribes of farther regions of central and northern Arabia. Upon the arrival of troops from those tribes, the number of his force grew to 10,000. He also immediately set about consolidating his command by writing to the four tribal

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<sup>70</sup> Lieutenant General A.I. Akram, *The Sword of Allah, Khalid bin Al-Waleed: His Life and Campaigns* (Rawalpindi, Pakistan: Ferozesons Limited/ Army Education Press, 1970), 223.

<sup>71</sup> Tabari: Vol. 2, 553-554.

<sup>72</sup> Lieutenant General A.I. Akram, *Sword of Allah, Khalid bin Al-Waleed: His Life and Campaigns* (Rawalpindi, Pakistan: Ferozesons Limited/ Army Education Press, 1970), 223.

chiefs of the northeastern tribes of Arabia, informing them of his appointment as commander of the army and his mission. These tribal chiefs arrived at Yamama with two thousand troops each.

During the preparation phase of his campaign, Khalid Bin Waleed was able to form a very clear idea of the strength and methods of warfare of the Persian forces through a well-developed system of informants and spies. The experiences of Muthanna from his recent raids into Persia were to prove most valuable to Khalid in understanding the fine quality and numerical strength of the Persian army and the courage, skill, and armaments of the Persian soldier. Heavily armed and equipped, the Persian was a perfect soldier for the set-piece frontal clash. The only glaring weakness lay in the Persians' lack of mobility and the slow speed of conducting marches due to heavy loads of equipment and materials.<sup>73</sup> On the other hand, Khalid's troops were mobile, mounted on camels with horses at the ready for cavalry attacks, and they were not only brave and skillful fighters but also adept at fast movement across any terrain, especially the desert. More importantly, thousands of these skilled warriors were veterans of the Campaign of Apotasy.

Before leaving Yamama, Khalid had arrived at a broad conception of how he would deal with the army of Hormuz. His mission was to fight the Persians, and a defeat of the Persian army was essential if the invasion of Mesopotamia was to proceed as the Caliph intended. The direction given to him by the Caliph to start from Uballa was by itself certain to bring the Persians to battle because no Persian general could let Uballa fall.<sup>74</sup> Uballa was the main southern port of the Persian Empire and was extremely vital to its commercial prosperity. It was also at a junction of many land routes that gave it a decisive strategic importance. Khalid thus chose Uballa as his first operational objective and initiated operations within the ambit of his historic Persian Campaign that was to span over a year.

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<sup>73</sup> George F. Nafziger and Mark W. Walton, *Islam at War: A History* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 19.

<sup>74</sup> Lieutenant General A.I. Akram, *The Sword of Allah, Khalid bin Al-Waleed: His Life and Campaigns* (Rawalpindi, Pakistan: Ferozesons Limited/ Army Education Press, 1970), 227.

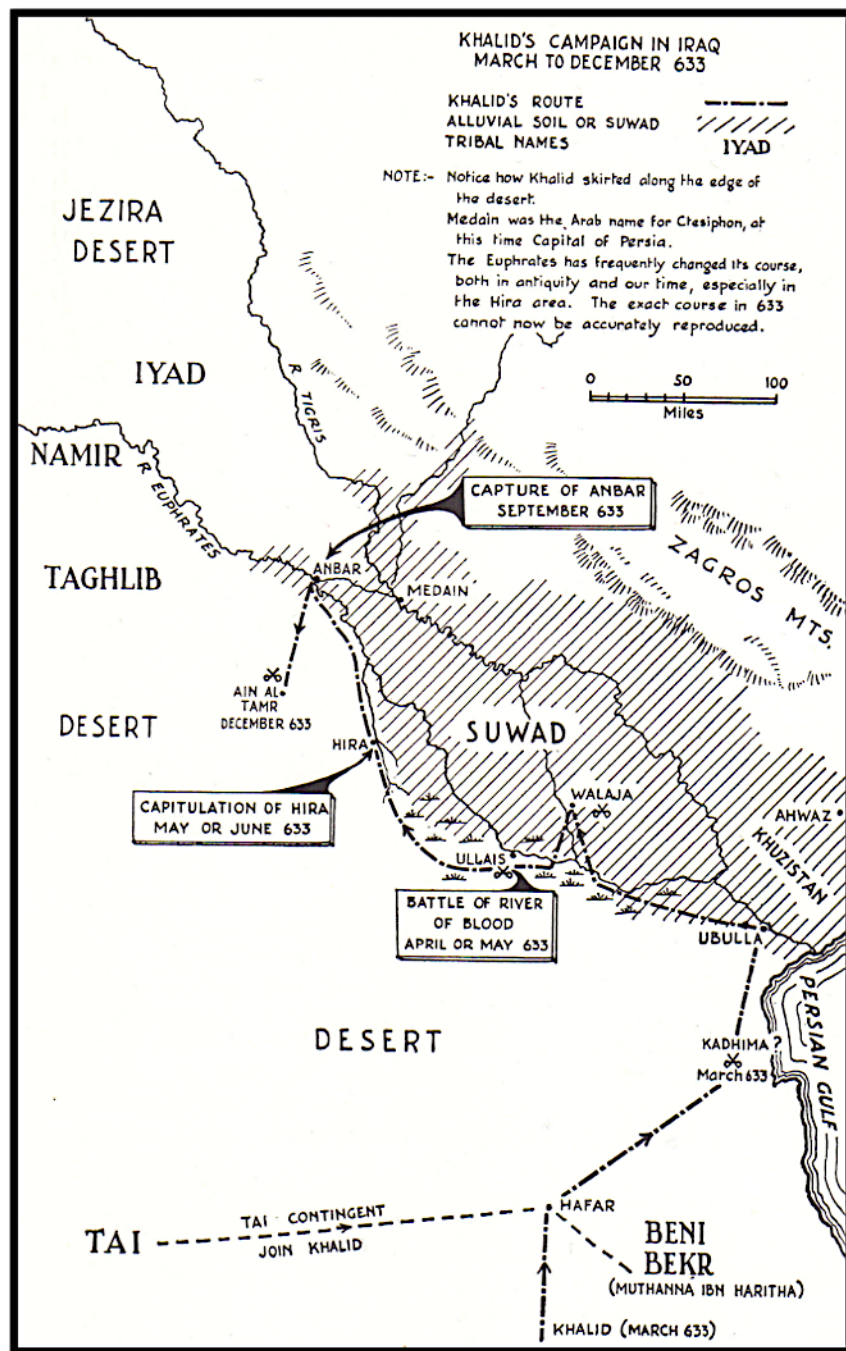


Figure 2: Khalid Bin Waleed's Persian Campaign. Taken from John B. Glubb, *The Great Arab Conquests* [New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1967], 105.

Within a month of receipt of his mission, Khalid Bin Waleed completed his preparations and set out from Yamama in the third week of March 633.<sup>75</sup> He audaciously sent across a letter to Hormuz, the Persian Governor of the frontier district stating, “submit to Islam and be safe or agree to the payment of Jizya, and you and your people will be under our protection; else you will have only yourself to blame for the consequences; for I bring a people who desire death as ardently as you desire life.”<sup>76</sup>

The Persians had traditionally disregarded the illiterate and backward Arabians and viewed them with contempt. Such a direct challenge to his authority by the commander of an inferior race infuriated Hormuz. He immediately informed the Emperor about the imminent invasion by Khalid Bin Waleed and began his preparations to thwart the enemy. Hormuz could have chosen to fight a defensive battle closer to Uballa, but having previously experienced the terrible havoc wrought by Musanna and his mobile raiders in his district, he did not want the Arabs to approach close enough in the fertile region of Uballa. Hormuz wanted to inflict a crushing defeat to Khalid’s army in a pitched battle to reduce him to his size. He decided to move south and give battle at Kazima.<sup>77</sup>

Khalid’s plan for the opening battle of his campaign underscored an important tenet of his operational approach that arrayed his force’s unique advantage of mobility against the Persian’s lack of mobility and heavy equipment to create an asymmetric advantage. He planned to dislocate the enemy by posturing his forces in a manner that would force them to carry out marches and countermarches to wear them down. Geography assisted him in mounting this operational maneuver to degrade enemy’s ability to react in an efficient manner. The two routes from Yamama to Uballa via Kazima and Hufeir facilitated his maneuver. Khalid knew that the

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 226.

<sup>76</sup> Tabari: Vol 2, 554.

<sup>77</sup> Lieutenant General A.I. Akram, *The Sword of Allah, Khalid bin Al-Waleed: His Life and Campaigns* (Rawalpindi, Pakistan: Ferozesons Limited/ Army Education Press, 1970), 228.

Persians would expect him to advance on the direct route to Uballa via Kazima and would make their defensive plans accordingly.

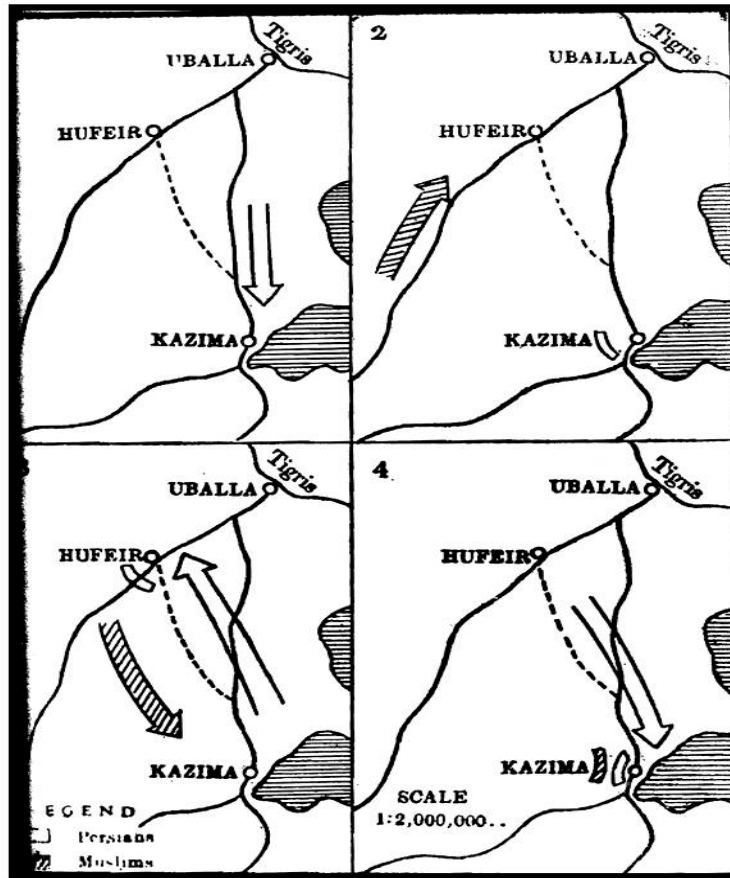


Figure 3: Khalid Bin Waleed's operational maneuver for Battle of Kazima. Taken from Lieutenant General A.I. Akram, *The Sword of Allah, Khalid bin Al-Waleed: His Life and Campaigns* (Rawalpindi, Pakistan: Ferozesons Limited/ Army Education Press, 1970), 233.

However, Khalid Bin Waleed divided his army into three groups and started his march towards Hufier with a gap of one day each between these groups. He intentionally did not conceal the movement of his army along this axis to force the Persians to shift their forces to Hufier to avoid losing Uballa without battle. As soon as he gained information that the Persian army had moved to Hufier, he shifted his forces back towards Kazima by exploiting the advantage of his troops to operate in desert with ease. After marching with heavy load over a distance of 100 miles in four days, the Persian army arrived back at Kazima. Khalid immediately formed up his army in



its combat formation of center, two wings, and a mobile reserve and advanced forward to give battle.<sup>78</sup>

The Persian army of the time used to follow the practice of joining its soldiers together with a metal chain to present a formidable front. This important opening battle of the campaign took place in the first week of April 633 and came to be known as the Battle of Chains.<sup>79</sup> Despite being inferior in number, the fast moving Arabs assailed the entire front of the steady chain linked Persian infantry. The Persian soldiers despite their exhaustion of marching for four days put up a stiff resistance. However, soon the superior skill and courage of the Muslims and the fatigue of the Persians began to tell and after several attempts, the Muslims succeeded in breaking the Persian front at a number of places. Although a large portion of the army succeeded in extricating from the battle, yet the Muslim Arabs slaughtered thousands of Persians, achieving their first and overwhelming victory of the campaign.

Such an approach of conducting swift and fluid operations with a keen sense of exploiting enemy weakness while taking advantage of terrain considerations was characteristic of Khalid Bin Waleed's creative approach.<sup>80</sup> His decision-making was greatly informed by his previous combat experiences and was in line with his natural instinctive abilities to think holistically and conduct tactical actions in line with the strategic requirements.

Khalid spent only a few days to tend to organizational matters of the territory that he had gained and quickly set his army in motion again towards the north. He sent forward a force of 2,000 men under the command of Musanna to reconnoiter the country and kill any stragglers from the Battle of Chains. In order to subdue minor towns along the route, he assigned small number of forces to conduct siege operations but kept pressing forward with his main army

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 228.

<sup>79</sup> S.K. Malik, *Khalid Bin Walid: The General of Islam* (Lahore, Pakistan: Ferozesons Limited, 1968), 43.

<sup>80</sup> John B. Glubb, *The Great Arab Conquests* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1967) and *The Empire of the Arabs* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1965), 39.

towards the port town Uballa; all the while moving carefully along the fringes of the desert to avoid any threat from his rear. This was one of the most important aspects of Arab warfare towards which Khalid always paid particular attention. The Arabs were a logistically self contained force that drew sustenance from the spoils of victory but while conducting operations they preferred keeping the desert at their back to keep the route of withdrawal open and to ensure security of their rear areas. These practices continued to form an important part of Khalid's operational approach in the Persian Campaign especially because the Persians lacked the ability to operate in the desert.<sup>81</sup>

It is pertinent to note that upon receipt of the news from Hormuz about the threat from the Arabs, the Persian Emperor had organized a fresh army at Ctesiphon under Qarin bin Qaryana, a top-ranking general of the Persian army, as reinforcement for Hormuz.<sup>82</sup> Qarin and his army were still mid way when they heard about the disaster at Kazima. The remnants of the army of Hormuz soon joined Qarin. Fueling with contempt on being defeated in battle by an army of uncultured and unsophisticated Arabs from desert, the Persian force yearned to avenge their defeat.

Musanna passed back information of this new army to Khalid who quickly assessed the latest situation and decided to send only a detachment to subdue and take control of Uballa. After defeating the army of Hormuz at the Battle of Kazima, Khalid was confident that this port town would not pose stiff resistance. He adapted his plans according to the changed situation and quickly moved with his Army to join Musanna in the third week of April 633 near the vicinity of the Maqil River. Qarin was a wise general who had deployed his forces with the river close

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<sup>81</sup> George F. Nafziger and Mark W. Walton, *Islam at War: A History* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 18-19.

<sup>82</sup> Lieutenant General A.I. Akram, *The Sword of Allah, Khalid bin Al-Waleed: His Life and Campaigns* (Rawalpindi, Pakistan: Ferozesons Limited/ Army Education Press, 1970), 239.

behind him that precluded chances of the Arabs either maneuvering the Persians away from their positions as had been done with Hormuz or of any chances of attacking them from the rear.<sup>83</sup>

After assessing the situation and deployment of the enemy forces, Khalid had no option but to fight a general set-piece battle, in the imperial Persian style. At the very beginning, the Persians lost all their top three commanders in the initial duels. Thereafter, despite numerical superiority and putting up a brave fight, the Persian army lost all its cohesion. Under the pressure of the continued Arab attacks, their resistance broke down. While several thousand Persians were able to escape once again however, according to Tabari, around 30,000 of them were killed.<sup>84</sup>

Khalid understood his dual responsibilities of being a military commander and the political head. He had to govern on behalf of the Caliph. He therefore turned more seriously to the administration of the districts conquered by the Muslims and took measures on a more permanent footing. According to the instructions of the Quranic concept of war, Khalid offered the people of the towns the option to pay nominal tax/ tribute (Jizya) for protection against any threat and for enjoying the freedom to choose their own way of life. Such a treatment by the new victors surprised the local Christian Arabs who as Peter Mansfield highlights had seethed with discontent against the despotic military rulers and heretical opposition to the official Zoroastrian religion of Persia.<sup>85</sup>

Khalid categorically ensured that no killing of women, children, or elderly took place and strictly curtailed unnecessary damage on the property of the people. Through a combination of swift and furious conduct of battles and prudent diplomacy in the towns, he was able to instill a combination of fear to resist him and his army as well as providing incentive to the other Christian Arab tribes of enjoying civic liberty in the conquered districts. Since Khalid Bin

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 241.

<sup>84</sup> Tabari: Vol 2, 554.

<sup>85</sup> Peter Mansfield, *The Arabs* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1976), 35.

Waleed understood the strategic importance of taking Hira in an earlier time frame, such measures ensured that his rear was secure as he quickly moved forward after each battle.

On the other hand, owing to an excellent communication system, the Persian Emperor despite being 3,000 miles away at Ctesiphon had received the information of the outcome of the Battle of River by the end of the same day.<sup>86</sup> Realizing the gravity of the situation, the Emperor ordered mustering of two more large armies under the command of Andarzaghgar, governor of the frontier province, and Bahman. By now the Persians understood the Arab mind well enough to know that no Arab force would move far from the desert so long as there were no opposing forces within striking distance of its rear and its route to the desert. Expecting the Arabs to move west, the Emperor selected the location of Walaja to entice Khalid into battle and forcing him to move away from the desert.<sup>87</sup> The two Persian armies moving separately were to join each other at Walaja and overwhelm the Arab force with sheer number and force.

By now, Khalid had organized an efficient network of intelligence through local agents; completely won over by the generous treatment that Khalid meted out to the local population. This was in striking contrast to the earlier harsh conditions under which the local Christian Arabs had to live in under the Persian rule. Thus, Khalid was able to remain apprised of the affairs of Persia and the movement of the Persian forces. As soon as the Persian armies set into motion, so did Khalid.

For the first time in the campaign, General Khalid Bin Waleed found himself in a difficult situation. He faced two pressing issues. Too many Persians and local Christian Arabs were escaping from one battle to fight in the next. If he was to continue defeating large enemy forces with his small army, he was to ensure that none got away from the battle. The second issue

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<sup>86</sup> Lieutenant General A.I. Akram, *The Sword of Allah, Khalid bin Al-Waleed: His Life and Campaigns* (Rawalpindi, Pakistan: Ferozesons Limited/ Army Education Press, 1970), 241.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 244.

was a strategic one; two large armies combining were now about to oppose him.<sup>88</sup> He decided to maintain initiative and conducted an operational maneuver to defeat the enemy piecemeal before the two armies could join. Khalid moved his forces towards Walaja and engaged the army of Andarzaghar in a fierce battle that took place in the first week of May 633. Khalid employed the tactics of a frontal holding attack and combined it with a powerful double envelopment by his cavalry, which had maneuvered to the rear of the Persian army in complete secrecy of the night. Their sudden appearance on the battlefield laid a tight ring of steel around the enemy that threw them off balance.<sup>89</sup>

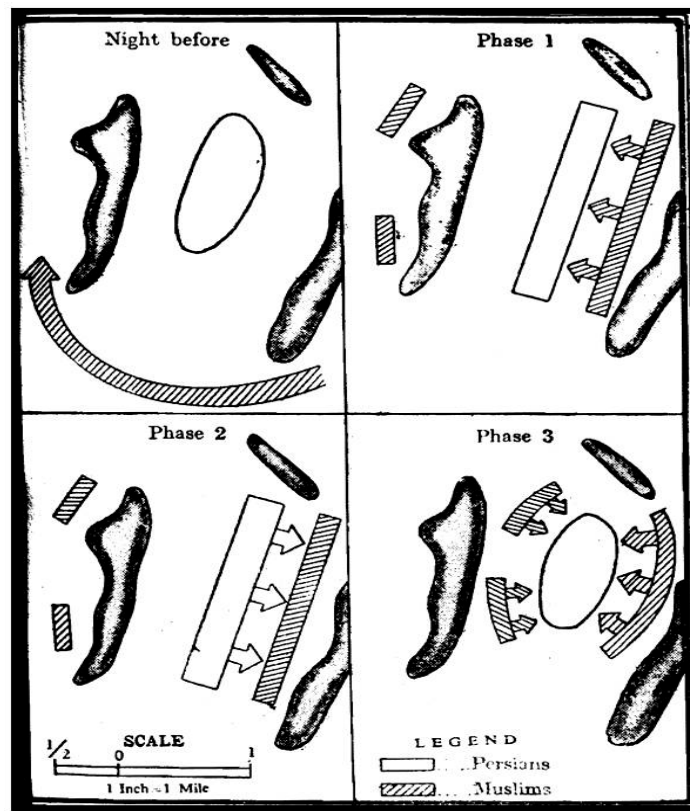


Figure 4: Battle of Walaja, taken from Lieutenant General A.I. Akram, *The Sword of Allah, Khalid bin Al-Waleed: His Life and Campaigns* (Rawalpindi, Pakistan: Ferozesons Limited/ Army Education Press, 1970), 251.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 246-247.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 249.

The news of the defeat at the Battle of Walaja shook the Empire to its foundations. Never before in its long history had the empire suffered such successive military defeats at the hands of a force so much smaller than its own armies and that too near its seat of power.<sup>90</sup> The emperor ordered Bahman towards the town of Ullais to link up with the forces of Christian Arabs and stop Khalid from approaching Hira. However, Bahman sent his forces under the command of his subordinate commander Jaban and himself returned to Ctesiphon.<sup>91</sup>

Characteristically, Khalid remained well informed about the latest developments and called for reinforcement from his troops that he had deputed for security of the conquered southern region.<sup>92</sup> Khalid rested his army for ten days and started moving towards Ullais as soon as reinforcements arrived. The strength of his army had once again increased to 18,000. In this battle, Khalid completely relied for victory on the sheer speed and violence of his attack and took his enemy by surprise to the extent that they were still consuming their meals when Khalid fell upon them.

The clash at Ullais was to become the fiercest battle of the campaign. The Persians and their Arab auxiliaries fought a do-or-die battle, for if this battle was lost then nothing could save Hira. Due to the intense fighting, Khalid prayed for divine assistance and pledged, “O Lord! If you give us victory, I shall see that no enemy warrior is left alive until their river runs with their blood.”<sup>93</sup> The Arabs persevered the onslaught of the enemy and finally managed to break their resistance with determined counter attacks. Khalid broke up his cavalry into several groups in pursuit of the fleeing enemy forces. He ferociously kept his promise wherein for the next three days, stragglers of the Persian and Christian Arab forces were continuously brought back to the banks of the river and were decapitated to the last man.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 255.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 256.

<sup>92</sup> S.K. Malik, *Khalid Bin Walid: The General of Islam* (Lahore, Pakistan: Ferozesons Limited, 1968), 44.

<sup>93</sup> Tabari: Vol 2, p 561.

The Battle of Ullais proved to be the swansong of Emperor Ardesher who lay dying. The fear, which the name Khalid now evoked, had become a psychological factor and the Empire hesitated to send any more armies to face him. The battle at Ullais, famously called the Battle of the River of Blood, reflected the fact that Khalid slaughtered all of the enemy prisoners that came under his hand. He used it to send a clear message to the other tribesmen of the area. This would be a particularly useful message – the Arab desert tribes were the only ones who would possibly interfere with the desert power strategy that the veteran warrior was employing. Thus, Khalid both defeated the threat to his rear and made a recurrence less likely.<sup>94</sup>

With the victory at Ullais, and with some reinforcements from the tribe of Beni Temeem, the Muslims moved north, again while remaining on the west bank of the Euphrates. They soon confronted and besieged the fortified city of Hira in May 633. Hira was by far the largest and most formidable city that the Arabs had yet encountered and it represented a unique problem to the Arabs; they lacked the equipment and skills of siege warfare. However, Khalid still resorted to laying a siege to the town with whatever forces and equipment were available to him. In the absence of any relief reinforcements from the Persian Army, the town of Hira surrendered on the terms of paying tribute/ tax. However, the elders of this town refused to convert to Islam and opted to keep their Christian faith. In view of the Islamic concept of war that provided religious, social, and civic freedom to the people of the conquered lands, Khalid Bin Waleed readily allowed them the same.<sup>95</sup> The terms of surrender were drawn and a treaty was signed. The objective given to by the Caliph was achieved within an astonishing span of three months after four intense battles and several smaller engagements.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> George F. Nafziger and Mark W. Walton, *Islam at War: A History* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 19.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>96</sup> John B. Glubb, *The Great Arab Conquests* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1967) and *The Empire of the Arabs* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1965), 39.

Khalid spent the next two months organizing the administration of the conquered territories. In the first week of August 633, he set about conducting military operations in the north to exploit his success and consolidate his control over the entire Mesopotamian region while remaining towards the west of the Euphrates. He captured the walled city of Anrab. In December 633, Khalid moved back into the desert to deal with yet another threat to his desert lines of communication mounted by Christian Arab tribes who, with the aid of a small Persian garrison, threatened to cut Khalid's line of retreat. He effectively neutralized this threat at Ain el Tamr.<sup>97</sup>

As Khalid was getting ready to head back for Hira, he received a call for help from Ayaz Bin Ghanam, the commander of another Muslim Arab army that was operating in Dumat-ul-Jandal.<sup>98</sup> Khalid responded to the call and left the Mesopotamian theatre for a few weeks to assist Ayaz in reduction of the fortress of the Christian Arabs at Dumat-ul-Jandal. The news of his departure arrived quickly at the Persian court. The Persians thought that Khalid had returned to Arabia with a large part of his army. Filled with a desire to throw the Muslims back into the desert and regain the territories and the prestige of the Empire, Bahman organized a new army from all available resources. However, since he did not consider the strength and quality of the force to be sufficient, Bahman decided to commit this army to battle only after the large forces of Christian Arabs who remained loyal to the Empire had augmented its strength.<sup>99</sup>

Bahman moved his armies to Huseid and Khanafis in the northern region of Mesopotamia with the overall plan to attack Hira from the North after the Christian Arab tribes of the region joined them. Although the Persian armies reached at their assigned locations at the given time, but they got late in their attack on Hira because the Christian Arab tribes were yet not

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>98</sup> Lieutenant General A.I. Akram, *The Sword of Allah, Khalid bin Al-Waleed: His Life and Campaigns* (Rawalpindi, Pakistan: Ferozesons Limited/ Army Education Press, 1970), 234.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 234.



prepared and could not timely join them. Khalid's subordinate commander Qaqa, in charge of the region in his absence, gained information of these developments and took counter measures to strengthen Hira by pulling back all available troops in the region.<sup>100</sup> Moreover, he pushed two small forces to Huseid and Khanafis with a view to delay the advance of the Persians in case they decided to push forward.

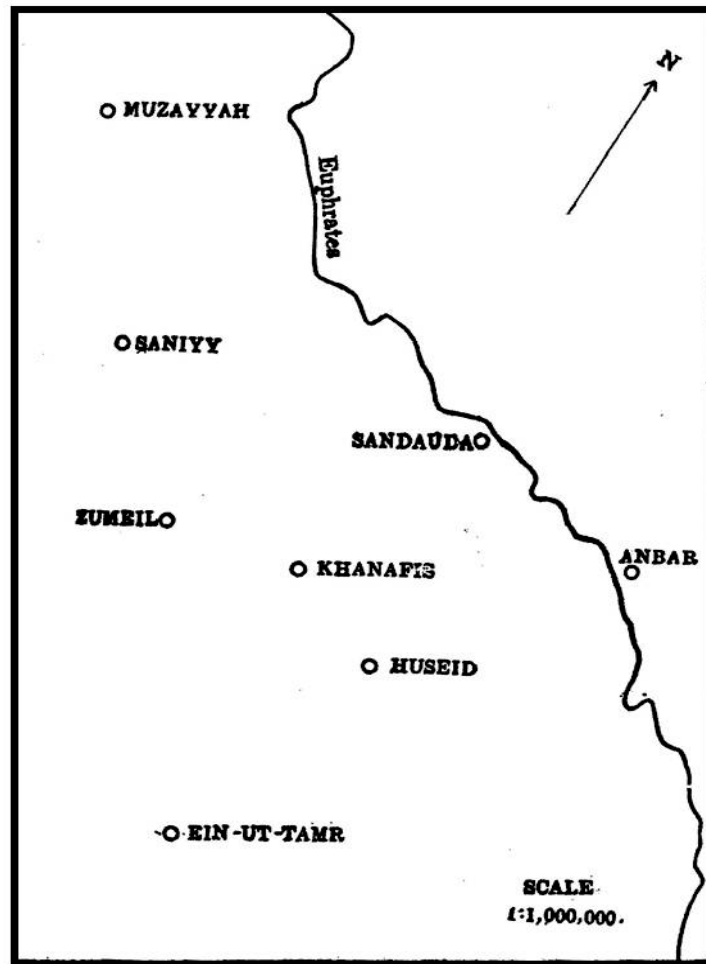


Figure 5: Khalid Bin Waleed's last opposition in Mesopotamia, taken from Lieutenant General A.I. Akram, *The Sword of Allah, Khalid bin Al-Waleed: His Life and Campaigns* (Rawalpindi, Pakistan: Ferozesons Limited/ Army Education Press, 1970), 287.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 288.

Khalid Bin Waleed arrived back at Hira in the fourth week of September 633 amid this volatile situation. After carrying out an assessment of the situation, he quickly decided to take the offensive to regain the initiative. Once again, Khalid's prime consideration was to restrict the Persian armies from joining to form a formidable force. He decided to concurrently attack both locations with two separate forces of 5000 men each. While staying at Ain al Tamr with the reserve force, he waited for his plan to unfold.<sup>101</sup> The Battle of Huseid was successfully fought in the middle of October 633, but the second Arab force aimed at Khanafis got delayed and could not simultaneously launch the attack. Resultantly, the Persian commander at Khanafis, on hearing about the defeat at Huseid, withdrew his force to join the Christian Arabs at Muzayah.<sup>102</sup>

Since the bulk of the imperial Persian army was now concentrated at Muzayah, it was the perfect opportunity for Khalid to launch an attack at the vulnerable imperial capital of Ctesiphon.<sup>103</sup> However, after due consideration to the strategic limitations set forth by the Caliph, he decided against it and instead planned an audacious converging attack on Muzayah simultaneously from three directions at night. For this difficult maneuver, Khalid divided his army into three corps and gave detailed orders for executing the plan in a successful manner. Although he was putting his army to a severe test of precision, but his battle hardened army proved up to the task and not only carried out the maneuver flawlessly but inflicted another crushing defeat to the combined forces of the Persians and Christian Arabs.<sup>104</sup>

After this resounding success, Khalid Bin Waleed having gained the initiative, pressed on and conducted high tempo operations at two neighboring locations of Saniyy and Zumeil where smaller armies of Christian Arabs had also concentrated. Khalid repeated the three-pronged maneuver at both the locations with equal amount of success and by November 633 completely

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 289.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 290.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 290-291.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 291.

broke the final resistance in Mesopotamia. In less than a month, Khalid Bin Waleed crushed large imperial forces in four separate battles covering an operational area whose length was 100 miles.<sup>105</sup> He was able to achieve these successive successes once more by exploiting the tremendous mobility of his mounted army, by the use of audacity and surprise, and by violent offensive action.

This was Khalid's last victory over the Persians as he was re-directed by the Caliph to take over the overall command of Muslim Arab forces operating in Syria in April 634. However, the foundations that Khalid laid in his campaign in Mesopotamia set the stage for the fall of the Persian Empire three years later in the Battle of Qadasiya that sounded the death knell of the old Persian Empire.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 293.

<sup>106</sup> George F. Nafziger and Mark W. Walton, *Islam at War: A History* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 20.

## **Analysis of the Campaign**

It is pertinent to note that despite the forays of twentieth century Western historians into the early Arab conquests in a more scientific manner, the perception still largely prevails that these conquests were essentially the result of mindless battles that exploited the exhausted and declining power of the Persian Empire.<sup>107</sup> However, Walter E. Kaegi instructively reports on the methodology of early Arab conquests that were led by General Khalid by positing that, “The Muslim leaders drew their enemy into a situation that at some point made a Muslim victory overwhelmingly probable . . . the battle involved the Muslim use of much planning and craft, and excellent use of the topography, not mere hurling of masses of bodies against the opposing forces in order to overwhelm them.”<sup>108</sup>

By employing the evaluation criteria articulated through a theoretical synthesis of Shimon Naveh and James Schneider, highlighted in the previous section, this section of the monograph will carry out an organized analysis to ascertain Khalid Bin Waleed’s abilities as an operational artist.

### **Operational Objectives – Cognitive Tension Between Strategy and Tactics**

A cursory overview of Khalid Bin Waleed’s entire actions in the Persian Campaign, from the initial stages of preparation to the terminal stages of exploitation and consolidation, are indicative of a clear intellectual direction to understand and determine the political and strategic aims of the Caliph. His actions also indicate an appreciation of the cognitive tension between the strategic objectives and the tactical actions required to accomplish them. General Khalid was able to grasp the scope and span of his actions and developed operational objectives in the most

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<sup>107</sup> Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of Caliphates*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2004), 14.

<sup>108</sup> Walter E. Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 128.

logical manner, which would move the entire system of his forces towards its final objective by sequencing tactical actions in a systematic manner. He arrayed the strength of his forces: mobility, shock action, and expertise in desert warfare - against the weakness of his enemy; their lack of mobility and fissures in maintaining support of the local Arab tribes. His selection of operational objectives and the manner in which he sequenced his tactical actions, clearly point towards the fact that he did not approach the attainment of his strategic objective of capturing Hira in a mechanical manner of seeking a single battle. On the contrary, he had the ability to think and act holistically by appreciating the need to govern and effectively absorb the captured territories in the entire region of Mesopotamia so that the tactical successes could meaningfully translate into a lasting strategic success. From Kazima to the fall of Hira, until the consolidation around the northern region of Ain ul Tamr, he selected his operational objectives in a systematic manner, luring the Persian and Christian Arab forces into decisive battles, which achieved a synergistic effect in defeating the enemy's will and sequentially degrading the enemy's capacity to wage war effectively.

At the very outset, Khalid Bin Waleed's quick and adequate preparations for the campaign indicate his appreciation of the criticality of time, space, and resources required to accomplish his aim. He displayed a clear understanding of the relevant strategic context in which he was to operate and appropriately adapted his tactical actions that suitably pursued the strategic objective. He implicitly understood the policy objectives of the Caliph of expanding the influence of Islam in the region of Christian Arabs of the Lakhmid Dynasty and his actions were in accordance with the demands of his operational tasks: defeat of Persian and local Christian Arab forces in battle and effective governance of captured territories to meaningfully absorb them within the Arabian control. At several places in the campaign, Khalid Bin Waleed applied restraint and did not select operational objectives that would exceed the strategic framework articulated by the Caliph, by either conducting deeper operations in the Persian territory or getting

embroiled in a protracted conflict that would exert a pull on resources thereby affecting preparations of the impending Syrian Campaign.

## **Operational Approach**

Khalid's actions illustrate the manner in which he designed his bold and audacious operational approach to draw out the Persian and Christian Arab forces in battle while relying on the strength of his mobility and decisive actions. He was able to accrue effects of these tactical actions in concert with the diplomatic maneuvers through his sublime handling of the locals in populated areas, which relied on effective governance, liberty, and tolerance in accordance with the Quranic concept of war. His true genius lay in his ability to continually adapt his tactical actions within the overall construct of his operational approach to exploit the maximum potential of emerging situations.

By intuitively and creatively articulating a broad conceptualization of the general actions that would produce the conditions contributing towards the end state, Khalid Bin Waleed arrayed the unique capabilities of his forces against the enemy and created an asymmetric advantage in the theatre of operation, which the Persians could never effectively counter.

Khalid's operational approach thus became the creative force of his campaign through which he was able to assign his components a specific purpose: to reconnoiter and gain information, protect his rear areas, and maneuver to envelop the enemy are a few pertinent cases in point. While he speedily progressed forward, he allocated and left behind appropriate forces for consolidation of tactical victories through effective governance of captured areas.

Khalid's continual assessment of the Persian forces throughout the campaign was indicative of a flexible, determined, and an agile commander.<sup>109</sup> After each successive tactical victory, he continuously reframed the operational environment, identifying which tactical

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 1-5.

objective continued to serve towards accomplishment of the strategic objective. He by-passed Ubulla and several other smaller towns while investing them with smaller forces and continuously kept his focus on the next enemy force that was posturing against him. He did not move his forces deeper into Persia so as to avoid the risk of becoming decisively engaged in a battle of attrition on unfavorable terms. He only made this exception at Walaja, when it was necessary to circumvent the two approaching armies from joining against him.

He continually updated his understanding of both the enemy situation and the terrain and was always able to respond to the successive waves of Persian forces in the most decisive manner.<sup>110</sup> At the same time, he had a keen ability to adapt to a changed situation and always acted in a manner that would pay rich dividends. This aspect becomes particularly evident when one examines his actions at the Battle of the River of Blood and the Siege of Hira. He could be murderous and he could be generous at the same time. Neither or both reflected his true character. Ultimately, the desert warrior had the flexibility of mind to adapt to a course that would best further his goal.<sup>111</sup> He was generous in most dealings with the Persian cities that he occupied, but he was ruthless with the nomads who opposed him.<sup>112</sup> The aim of these ruthless executions of his enemies in the battle was deliberately tailored to obtain two effects; diluting any form of subsequent resistance by the locals in the urban areas and breaking the will of the local Christian Arabs, who were equally adept at operating in the deserts who could launch attacks in his rear areas. The uneducated desert warrior had an inherent understanding of creating strategic effects through a variety of tactical actions.

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<sup>110</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Field Manual (FM) 5-0*, March 2011, Change No 1 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office), 1-4.

<sup>111</sup> George F. Nafziger and Mark W. Walton, *Islam at War: A History* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 20.

<sup>112</sup> George F. Nafziger and Mark W. Walton, *Islam at War: A History* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 20.

This creative and adaptive operational approach successfully led Khalid Bin Waleed to his ultimate goal of destroying his enemy's capacity to wage war by simultaneously attacking his will and his means.<sup>113</sup>

## **Disruption**

It bears repetition that disruption is an immensely useful tool for an inferior force that strives to maintain initiative while conducting high tempo operations. Khalid Bin Waleed's actions underscored his intuitive understanding of this key concept. The high intensity with which he conducted his operations highlights his appreciation of the politically weak strategic environment in which Persia was operating. However, he was also cognizant of the depleted yet much superior combat power of the Persian military. By employing deception measures to initially conceal his intentions of capturing Hira, Khalid Bin Waleed denied the Persian court its ability to neither correctly understand the emerging threat from Arabia nor to coherently galvanize its entire military might to effectively crush the opposition. By conducting initial battles with a lightening speed in quick succession, he forced the Persian military's employment in a piecemeal fashion. Resultantly, despite having inferior number of forces, he was always able to achieve favorable ratio of forces on the battlefield.

Throughout the campaign, Khalid ensured that he maintained initiative and retained freedom of action to continually dislocate and disrupt his enemy. In the first phase of his operations leading to the capture of Hira, the accumulative effect of Khalid's tactical victories created such a devastating shock effect in Ctesiphon that despite having additional forces, the Persian Empire's command and control mechanism lost its ability to respond to make an attempt to expel the Arabs from Hira. The decision to launch a counter offensive was finally made upon

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<sup>113</sup> James J. Schneider and Lawrence L. Izzo, "Clausewitz's Elusive Center of Gravity," *Parameters*, (September 1987), 57.



receipt of information of Khalid's departure to Daumat ul Jandal; erroneously perceived as his final departure – a mistake that would have crippling consequences.

The second phase of the campaign that comprised Khalid's exploitation of success in the northern Mesopotamia and consolidation in the entire captured territory presented greater evidence of Khalid's success in maintaining initiative to further deprive the enemy the ability to react to a dynamic situation. Even in the terminal stages of the campaign when the Persians exploited Khalid's absence from the theatre, he was quick to take the offensive to regain initiative and dislodge the enemy forces from Huseid and Khanafis.

Khalid directed his army with a sense of purpose and clarity. He conducted lightening maneuvers by explaining the criticality of their actions to his subordinates at each important juncture and decisive point. He kept his army well resourced and gave them adequate respite to recover after each tactical engagement. Conversely, his ability to enforce battles on the Persians in quick succession highlights his ability to take risks to exploit any given opportunity. Even his enemies acknowledged this quality of Khalid when Ukeidar, one of the tribal chiefs at Daumat-ul-Jandal while addressing a conference of the tribal chiefs ahead of their clash with Khalid, stated, "I know more about Khalid than anyone else; no man is luckier than he. No man is his equal in war. No people face Khalid in battle, be they strong or weak, but are defeated. Take my advice and make peace with him."<sup>114</sup>

Another salient aspect of Khalid's campaign was his situational awareness because of which he almost always stayed ahead of the enemy decision-making cycle or was always in a position to respond in the most accurate and appropriate manner to deal with any emerging threat. The confident manner in which Khalid conducted his exploitation and consolidation phase in the northern region of Anbar is indicative of the fact that he was aware of and knew how to exploit the Persian culmination point.

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<sup>114</sup> Tabari: Vol. 2, 578.

General Khalid Bin Waleed understood the operational problems he faced, visualized clearly how to link complex and conflicting strategic requirements with his tactical means, and, through the creative application of the principles of operational art, displayed his credentials as one of the outstanding operational artists of the time.<sup>115</sup> His use of deception, operational tempo, and the indirect approach are sublime examples of how to disrupt and defeat an enemy in the most trying of physical and mental circumstances.<sup>116</sup>

## **Operational Maneuver**

The manner in which Khalid Bin Waleed conducted his campaign also provides evidence of the fact that he also understood the strategic and operational implications of his numerical inferiority and the weakness of his forces in conducting sustained operations away from the desert. Therefore, Khalid always aimed at maintaining freedom of action to inflict destruction on enemy's capacity to wage war in a sustained manner.

In order to maintain the effectiveness of his force, Khalid mounted an effective operational maneuver that allowed him to skirt around the fringes of the desert and postured his forces to commit to battle under the most favorable conditions. Even under relatively unfavorable circumstances in Walaja, he joined the battle at a time of his own choosing for which he once again relied on speed and surprise.<sup>117</sup> Khalid primarily conducted this maneuver to impose fragmentation on the two Persian armies that were poised to join against him. He exploited his freedom of action to defeat the enemy in time and space throughout the conduct of his campaign.

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<sup>115</sup> Department of the Army, *Army Doctrine Publication 3-0: Unified Land Operations* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2011), 13.

<sup>116</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Field Manual (FM) 3-0* February 2008, Change No. 1 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office), Ch. 7.

<sup>117</sup> John B. Glubb, *The Great Arab Conquests* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1967) and *The Empire of the Arabs* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1965), 42.

He distributed his operations in the entire depth of the theatre to carry out multiple operational tasks. However, he was always able to converge his forces at the point of application during the more crucial stages of the campaign.

While dealing with the Persian counter offensive in the northern region, Khalid's employment of converging maneuvers by three armies against the enemy positions in Huseid, Khanfis, and Muzzayah provide evidence of his understanding of the concept of simultaneity. By simultaneously maneuvering his forces in distributed operations in depth, he not only achieved freedom of action and conducted high tempo operations but also denied his enemies the intellectual and physical cohesion to react to these dynamic situations in a coherent manner.

## **Broad and Universal Theory**

Khalid's adherence to the Quranic concept of war gave his actions the doctrinal framework to guide his actions and enabled him to view the theatres of operation in a holistic manner. The theory recommends taking effective measures to defeat the enemy in battle while displaying benevolence and moderation towards the unarmed population.<sup>118</sup> The divine instructions to the Muslims to fight in the way of Allah in order to combat tumult and oppression as well as to spread the religion also gave a new fillip to the astute Arab warriors who were able to perform remarkable military feats in the face of heavy odds. Khalid Bin Waleed's letter to Hormuz before the Battle of Kazima is also an evidence of the religious conviction of the entire army and the inspiration that it obtained from it.

The seemingly impossible task of capturing Mesopotamia with a small army of 18,000 men from the Persian Empire was sufficient for any commander to get embroiled in suspicion and doubt over the viability of his plans. On the contrary, Khalid Bin Waleed imbibed with the

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<sup>118</sup> John B. Glubb, *The Great Arab Conquests* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1967) and *The Empire of the Arabs* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1965), 42.

confidence of the Islamic faith and the conviction in the divine favor towards the faithful, leapt forward with supreme confidence and vigor.

Moreover, the Quranic concept of war's articulation of just treatment to the local populace; especially women, children, and the elderly greatly assisted Khalid's accomplishment of his assigned objectives wherein the local Christian Arabs were convinced of a fair treatment and they readily accepted peace terms by signing treaties with him. Dr. Kaveh Farrokh particularly highlights this important aspect, "Arabs declared that they were bringing a divine message of egalitarianism and social justice to the populations of Sassanid Persia. This call was to have a profound impact upon the disaffected troops and populations of Persian who welcomed the Arabo-Muslims as liberators."<sup>119</sup>

Khalid also made painstaking efforts in selecting his troops for this campaign who not only had the requisite military ability but also whose religious moorings were sound. This army thus operated from top down in a complete harmony with the Quranic concept of waging war. The religious zeal and enthusiasm was key in conducting the operations, which placed super-human demands of endurance on his forces, and he was careful in ensuring that he had the appropriate force at his hands. The spirit of the time and unflinching belief in the religious obligation by the Muslim Arab Army is best captured by the comments of Musanna, "In the days of ignorance a hundred Persians could defeat a thousand Arabs, but now, Allah be praised, a hundred Arabs can put to flight a thousand Persians."<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Dr Kaveh Farrokh, *Shadows in the Desert: Ancient Persia at War* (Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, 2007), 265.

<sup>120</sup> George F. Nafziger and Mark W. Walton, *Islam at War: A History* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 24.

## Conclusion

Recognizing the reasons underlying the sustained success of Arab armies during the great conquest is important to not only understand the basic tenets of Islam but are also important with regards to the evolution of military thought. The biased narratives of Persian and Western historians of Middle East marginalize the military aspects of Khalid Bin Waleed's campaign in Persian Mesopotamia by emphasizing the decaying Persian political and military might at the time. Mathew S. Gordon provides a compelling counter point in this regard by stating that, 'the losses that the Byzantine and Sassanid empires incurred during their warfare of the late sixth and early seventh century were certainly a reason for the success of the Arab campaigns, they by no means stand-alone.'<sup>121</sup> On the other hand, Khalid Bin Waleed's more popular and even more resoundingly successful campaign against the Byzantine Empire in Syria (634-636) traditionally overshadows his accomplishments in Sassanid Persia.

This paper has highlighted military aspects of the Persian Campaign to illustrate the creative and physical dimensions of General Khalid Bin Waleed's capabilities as an effective military planner and practitioner. He displayed a clear understanding of the strategic context in which he was operating, had the ability to think and act operationally in a holistic manner, and executed perfectly sequenced tactical actions for the achievement of overall strategic objectives. The manner in which he planned and conducted his campaign in Persian Mesopotamia provides credible evidence of presence of certain characteristics and elements of operational art.

Despite operating under resource-constrained environment, he established operational objectives that achieved the strategic aim of seizing the assigned territories in the most efficient manner. His use of operational maneuver permitted freedom of action, placed his units at positions of advantage, and achieved operational and tactical surprise with devastating effects. Khalid Bin Waleed's operational approach was based on gaining and maintaining initiative

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<sup>121</sup> Mathew S. Gordon, *Rise of Islam* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2005), 11.

through sequential and simultaneous operations, relied on carefully planned and swift offensive operations, mobile warfare, and securing the allegiance of the local tribes and towns. Taking advantage of the weak politico-military milieu in the Persian Empire, Khalid focused on conducting successive decisive actions to degrade Persian military capability in order to cause disruption in their system. Finally, Khalid Bin Waleed's actions were in accordance with the Quranic concept of war that gave him a frame of reference, which guided his operational plans and actions in a coherent manner.

A symbiotic co-relation of thinking strategically, planning operationally, and acting tactically in a coherent manner were the hallmarks of General Khalid Bin Waleed's operations in Persian Mesopotamia. An analysis of this campaign establishes through credible evidence that the manner in which Khalid Bin Waleed conducted the Persian Campaign highlights presence and application of the critical characteristics and elements of the modern concept of operational art. Using the criteria through the synthesis of the theories of Schneider and Naveh, Khalid's Persian Campaign survives the test and substantiates the thesis that his actions and thoughts employed and embodied critical aspects of thinking and doing which military theorists and practitioners now consider, or identify, as operational art.

Everett Carl Dolman describes the purpose of strategy as a plan for attaining a position of continuing advantage and that of operational strategy for linking of military means to political aim by gaining command of the medium of battle, which allows the tactical and political aims to remain at odds logically but to converge practically.<sup>122</sup> General Khalid's conduct of Persian campaign in Mesopotamia reflects his intuitive understanding of this modern concept. By gaining a crucial and a firm foothold in Mesopotamia, he convincingly placed the Muslim Arabs in a position of continuing advantage. He laid the foundations of the subsequent conquest of the entire

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<sup>122</sup> Everett Carl Dolman, *Pure Strategy: Power and Principles in the Space and Information Age* (New York: Frank Cass, 2005), 4-6.

Persian Empire that the Muslim Arabs completed in 637. The enduring nature of these accomplishments are evident by the fact that even after fourteen centuries, the Muslims have practically not lost anything that they achieved due to Khalid Bin Waleed's victories in Mesopotamia and Syria as well.

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